

Executive summary

Making room for green remittances

The role of the diaspora engagement in fighting climate change effects in the origin country: the case study of the community from Burkina Faso in Italy

June, 2021

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This contribute stems from CeSPI's ten years' **research experience with the community from Burkina Faso in Italy**, building on the capacities of the diaspora in its co-development efforts for rural development, and involving migrants to financially support the agro-ecological enterprises in their areas of origin. The **latest research question, here discussed, concerns the possible role that migrant individuals and associations can play in facing climate change impacts in their country of origin**, either by means of monetary remittances, or by transferring knowledge and information, promoting innovative measures or projects of adaptation.

Based on a **longer study in Italian**¹ that includes a comprehensive literature review and context analysis, here is a **synthesis focusing on some research highlights on the perceptions related to climate change in Africa** and among the **burkinabé community in Italy**. Additionally, a **mapping and classification exercise** is presented of the different initiatives led by the diaspora worldwide to explicitly tackle climate change effects.

Why addressing diaspora green remittances

Migration within countries and across borders can be an adaptation strategy to the local environment degradation or to catastrophic natural events that compromise people's livelihood; at the same time, **migrants' remittances are a lifeline support and a co-insurance for families and communities** that decided

¹ "Il ruolo della diaspora in relazione ai cambiamenti ambientali in Africa- Il caso della diaspora burkinabé in Italia e il cambiamento climatico nel paese di origine", A. Ferro (June, 2021), study undertaken within the project "Imprese sociali innovative e partecipazione dei migranti per l'inclusione sociale in Burkina Faso" (AID 011455), funded by AICS – Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo (2018-21) (see <https://www.cespi.it/it/ricerche/imprese-sociali-innovative-partecipazione-dei-migranti-linclusione-sociale-burkina-faso>).

or had no other option but to stay in order to cope with income variability, losses or damages and mitigate risks in times of hardship². Remittances are a source of **additional or substitutive family income and liquidity**, while **solidarity projects** from migrants often provide access to water, schools, health facilities, sometimes reinforcement of capacities.

The relationship between the diaspora and climate change (CC) adaptation in the country of origin is not obvious and differs among migrants, based on: **a) the direct and personal experience with climate change events/impacts they had while in Africa** (whether originally from rural or urban areas particularly affected by environmental degradation), **b) the level of awareness of migrants residing abroad**, referred to what is happening in Africa today (in terms of conscious and genuine access to information on CC), **c) the level of awareness of the family/community of origin** in terms of understanding what is happening in their territories, whether linked to climate change or to other causes.

For the last 20 years, an extensive literature on migrants' contribution (co-development) has been flourishing, also because **engaging diasporas and leveraging remittances for development in the country of origin turned into a strategic commitment** of many origin countries' Governments, international agencies and public bodies, as well as NGOs and CSOs. When talking of **green remittances** - meaning all kinds of resources and capitals consciously transferred or activated by the diaspora to help communities to cope with environmental causes of poverty and fragility - **the distinctive element from other kinds of remittances is the explicit awareness among migrants to mobilize to specifically adapt to and prevent climate change impacts**, facing current problems and anticipating future ones through a long-term responsibility.

The African context in terms of climate and remittance flows

- 1. The climate context and trends in Africa confirm the vulnerability of the continent** (and especially of the Sahel region) **to climate change and to its interaction with existing dimensions of fragility** (poverty and diffuse inequalities, modest development, climate-dependent livelihoods), often intensifying conflicts and undermining security. The main highlights indicate that (IPCC, 2014):
 - The average temperatures in Africa increased by 0.5°C in the last 50 years. Different scenarios (related to the impact of greenhouse gas emissions) suggest that the mean average temperature may rise by more than 2°C by the end of the 21st century, with more frequent heatwaves;
 - Variability in the precipitation levels will increase (with an estimated stable annual average), although with more rainfall reductions in some areas and with more recurrent intense events (heavy rains, floodings).
 - Besides the risks of forced human mobility, many fragile African eco-systems result already altered by climate change in relationship to water availability and competition from people and local economies relying on it, local security and conflicts to access shrinking fertile land, compromised food productions, precarious health and education. Sub-Saharan Africa has 95% of rain-fed agriculture, while large share of countries' GDP and employment comes from the agriculture sector³.
- 2. The collection and availability of climate change data are essential, allowing countries to assess their present and future risks** triggered by environmental change and degradation and undertake preventive measures. Although **data on Africa are somewhat missing, inaccurate or hardly available at a granular**

² Both in terms of disaster/emergency response or development contribution.

³ <https://www.afdb.org/en/cop25/climate-change-africa>

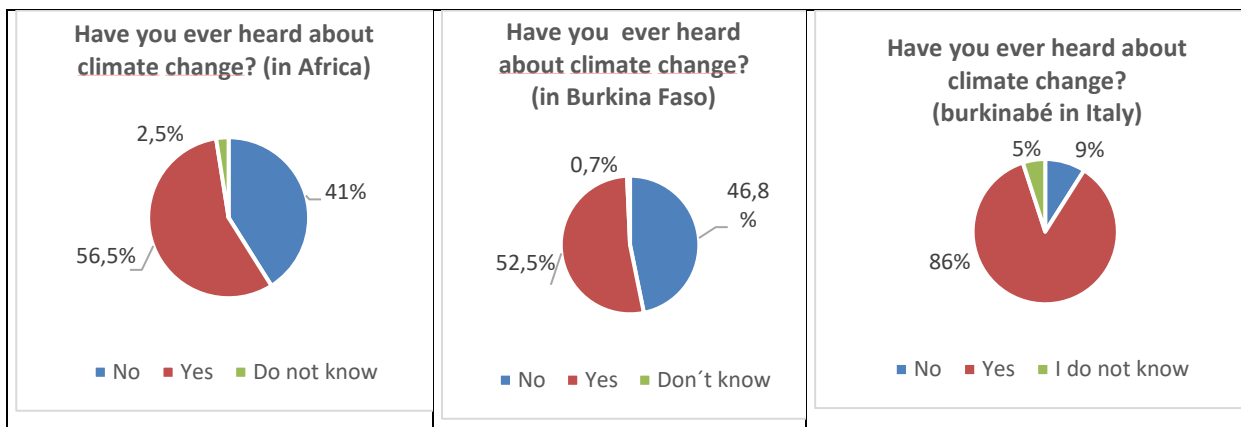
level, different monitoring tools show increasing challenges. According to the *Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index*, the last 12 positions in the ranking are occupied by African countries; the *Global Climate Risk Index* identifies Madagascar, India, Sri Lanka, Kenya and Rwanda as the low-medium income countries most affected by extreme weather events; considering the African *ecological footprint* (i.e. the consumption of resources versus the capacity to replace them⁴) in relationship to its bio-capacity (i.e. the productivity of the ecological assets), a move from an ecologic reserve condition is registered towards a current ecologic deficit⁵.

3. In 2020, official remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries reached \$540 billion, representing a 1.6% decrease compared to 2019 (*Migration and Development Brief 43*, May 2021⁶), while a worst decline (-20%)⁷ had been originally projected. The role of remittances varies greatly from country to country, representing between 5% and 20% of most Sub-Saharan countries' GDP in 2020, peaking up to more than 30% in the cases of Somalia and South Sudan⁸.

Perceptions on climate change in Africa

4. The perception of the magnitude and progression of climate change - and its impact at local level - varies a lot between nations and persons. It is a critical factor influencing policy decisions and communication, and it is mostly influenced by: weather events, economic and sociopolitical factors as well as individual factors (including education, income and rural-urban dimensions), and the expected degree of resilience to climate changes (Whitmarsh and Capstick, 2018; Shukla et al. 2019).

A few highlights are presented below, based on Afrobarometer⁹ (including 34 African countries and Burkina Faso¹⁰), and on a small pilot survey undertaken in 2021 among young burkinabé migrants living in Italy¹¹, bearing in mind that the statistical samples are different, and hence not comparable.



⁴ <https://www.footprintnetwork.org/our-work/ecological-footprint/>

⁵ <https://data.footprintnetwork.org/#/countryTrends?cn=2000&type=BCtot,EFctot>

⁶ https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Migration%20and%20Development%20Brief%2034_1.pdf

⁷ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/22/world-bank-predicts-sharpest-decline-of-remittances-in-recent-history>

⁸ Remittance inflows, consulted 13/06/21 <https://www.knomad.org/data/remittances>

⁹ <https://afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/analyse-online>, site consulted 25/05/21, and Afrobarometer Policy Paper, *Change ahead Experience and awareness of climate change in Africa*, n. 60, August 2019.

¹⁰ Data collection for Burkina Faso 2016/2018.

¹¹ The questionnaire addressed the burkinabé community in Italy, in Italian, and it was also translated into French and English to circulate along the ADEPT (Africa-Europe Diaspora Development Platform) network.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfqfEKYDXpDT2ARBM4htf59ArMulvdxrF9K0vIQTmmLgNm34w/viewform>

Afrobarometer sample: 45.696 persons interviewed in 34 African countries 2016/18	Afrobarometer sample: 1.200 persons interviewed in Burkina Faso 2016/18 (R7 - 2016/2018)	2021 online survey sample: 64 respondents based in Italy and originally from Burkina Faso
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5. **People from Burkina Faso are less aware of climate change (52,5%) compared other Africans (56,5%), and far less aware compared to the burkinabé based in Italy (86%).** Droughts are considered to be more severe by 74% of burkinabé in Africa (and by 49% of Africans from 33 surveyed countries), while 53% of burkinabé in Africa (41% of Africans from 33 surveyed countries) consider **floods** to be less severe. Among those in Burkina Faso who think that climate change needs to be stopped, **56%** consider that ordinary burkinabé could somehow contribute, while **29.5%** think that ordinary burkinabé could not.
6. **Most of the respondents belonging to the burkinabé community in Italy¹² consider the seasonal rain variability as the main effect of the climate change in their country of origin (60%), while 48% believe that droughts have increased.** 63% of the respondents report that their families in Burkina Faso were directly affected by losses and **damages to agriculture**, and 29% refer of direct losses in their family **economic activities**. When asked what the family and community in Burkina Faso are doing to face these complex arising conditions, 44% of respondents reply that **people are adapting** (in particular shifting to **more resilient cultivations** and seeds and 30% improving **irrigation/water conservation** solutions), while 38% mention **increased requests of monetary remittances from migrants**. The large majority (**76%**) think the **diaspora could play a role in relationship to climate change** in Africa and/or their country of origin. Nevertheless, 67% had never had to respond to environmental needs before, while the rest mobilized through additional transfer of remittances (64%) or community projects (48%), especially related to access to water and energy access and, to a lesser degree, agriculture. **59% would be interested in improving knowledge on climate change** issues and 56% would appreciate **to contribute concretely**. The ideas referred by burkinabé include: reinforcing migrants' awareness on climate change to transfer clear information to the country of origin; further engaging the diaspora in community projects related to water, agriculture and energy, while improving information and skills on technological and more innovative solutions; mobilizing experts; lobbying and contributing to the political debate.

The mapping and scouting of diasporas' initiatives on climate and environment

7. Based on a **scouting exercise¹³ on migrants' engagement** in coping with climate change in their respective country of origin, **a classification based on the different types of commitment and initiative was developed** (some selected examples are reported below).

¹² Data collected between January and March 2021 with an online questionnaire that circulated through the FJBI - Forum des Jeunes Burkinabé en Italie. No selection of respondents took place, but being originally from Burkina Faso (or Ivory Coast) or with migratory background from Burkina Faso (22%).

¹³ Dr. Valentina Mutti largely contributed to the mapping of diaspora initiatives.

Literature studies	The humanitarian role of diaspora for disasters' response	Diaspora led or integrated projects addressing CC	Influencers and CC diaspora champions	Political engagement and ecologic movements
Very few studies point at migrants' contribution to face climate change. Evidence from literature is mostly directed to the role of <i>remittances employed</i> to adapt to environmental effects.	In between CC recovery and traditional support, the diaspora typically engages in: -Raising funds through extended networks -Supporting reconstruction projects (schools/hospitals), supporting in health assistance, shipment of containers -Financially contributing to families. <i>Getting clear and immediate</i> information is essential to mobilize diasporas.	Solidarity projects led by diaspora organizations alone or in partnership with other partners are scarce. Main areas of intervention tend to be <i>access to water, energy</i> via solar panels and - less frequently - <i>training</i> in agroecological techniques.	Mostly second and third generations or highly transnational public profiles (especially via <i>social media</i>) with <i>migratory background</i> , not directly linked to diaspora communities but with a large audience of followers.	Diaspora <i>lobbying in Europe</i> , to raise awareness on climate change in Africa. Limited interest and support from the diasporas is shown towards the «Friday for futures» mobilization of young generations in Africa.
-Caven and Saratiel (2017), case study of the use of remittance among the Chikombedzi Community, Zimbabwe. -Hillmann, Okaine and Borri (2020), study in Ghana on the environmental change within the narrations of the Ewe diaspora.	<i>Diaspora groups:</i> UDION Foundation (from Bangladesh); Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA); Haitian Diaspora Emergency Response Unit (HDREU). <i>Institutional players</i> IOM disaster preparedness and response projects, diaspora for Humanity -Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination.	-Association Sunugal (Italy), fighting desertification and rural exodus. -Association UABT (Italy), awareness on the use of pesticides and training on ecological solutions. -Malian diaspora groups (France), supporting energy access in the Kayes region. -Individual green entrepreneurial projects.	-Georgie Badiel, model from Burkina Faso/Ivory Coast committed to support water access -Varshshini Prakash, Indian student in the USA that created the <i>Sunrise movement</i> . -Christine Nieves, young activist from Puerto Rico.	-ADDO/African Diaspora Development Organizations launched a declaration to be involved in discussions on CC in Africa at Paris2015 COP21. -Madagascar, «Generation Climate»: Madagascar Will Rise, funded by a girl, daughter of a very active Malagasy diaspora leader in France and student herself in France

8. This study also made an attempt to **investigate the relationship between the inflows of migrants' remittances into their country of origin and those measurable dimensions accounting for climate change (temperatures and precipitations)**. This search for correlation refers to the hypothesis that remittances often follow countercyclical patterns¹⁴ - i.e. increasing when the situation in the migrants' country of origin worsens (as it happened during the recent pandemic). If applied to weather variability induced by climate change, especially in relationship to rainfalls and rainfed agriculture¹⁵, **it could be inferred that remittance flows increase when the environmental conditions deteriorate and mostly when seasonal economic activities meet difficulties.**

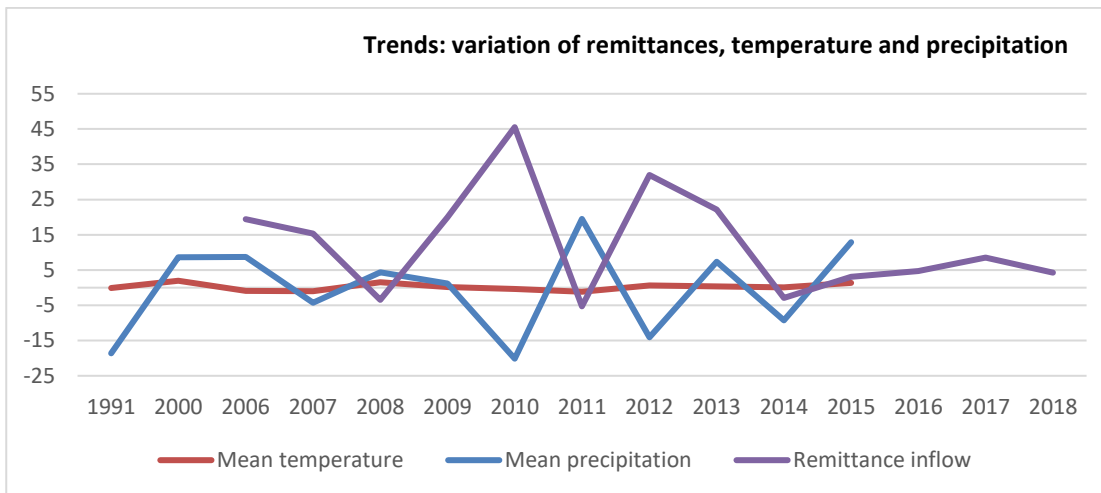
A **pilot case study has analysed yearly remittance inflows into Burkina Faso** with yearly mean temperatures and precipitations (in terms of percentage year-to-year variation of the mean)¹⁶. **Data and**

¹⁴ <https://www.nber.org/papers/w15419>

¹⁵ While not focussing on remittances as a natural disaster response.

¹⁶ Data employed include: "Migrant remittance inflows and outflows (US\$ million)", World Bank, (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data>), and rainfall and temperatures data (1991-2016), Climate Change Knowledge Portal, World Bank (<https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/>) sites consulted the 15/01/21.

methodology present some shortcomings, considering the importance to analyse trends on a seasonal basis (but remittance data only are available on a yearly basis); mean rain and temperatures miss the season and geographical variability; data are overall inaccurate, as data on remittances only include official flows, while information on rain and temperature can be incomplete. Nevertheless, remittance flows seem to generally increase during those years when precipitations lessen and vice versa, as shown in the graph below. Temperature variability seems to be less relevant than rain variability.



Concluding remarks

9. The **current debate on climate change adaptation measures is gaining public momentum**, especially when considering the European Green New Deal and the incoming COP26 – conference of the parties. **Migrations can be described at the same time as part of the problem**, being potentially induced by local, direct or indirect impacts of climate change (being one of the different causes of human mobility), **and part of the solution**, as they help in identifying adaptation measures and promoting resilient behaviors and solutions for those who stay. Part of the current debate on facing climate change¹⁷, especially referring to low-middle income countries, highlights the need for a governance able to negotiate between science and technology indications, western approaches and global top-down solutions, and inclusive and bottom-up community decision making participatory processes – thereby including migrants among the stakeholders to be involved.
10. Moreover, as migrants already and largely help their communities and families in the origin country, also mitigating the negative impacts of climate change, **once more an over-optimistic view of the potentials, capacities and responsibilities of the diaspora from abroad should be avoided**. Neither all migrants are well informed and fully aware of the predicted climate scenarios concerning Africa, nor they gain **valuable or transferrable competences** in relation to local climate adaptation, or are in the condition to mobilize for collective action.

¹⁷ 5th European Climate Change Adaptation Conference ECCA 2021, “Building back better: COVID recovery, resilience building and societal transformation”, 10th of June 2021 (<https://www.ecca21.eu/>).

11. In future, it **migrants shall be reinforced by gaining and developing a clear and fact-based information, awareness and view of the future for Africa**, in order to **consciously assess risks** and vulnerabilities of their own families and communities and adopt or suggest beneficial behaviors and mindsets.

A selection of recommendations to facilitate diaspora's engagement towards green remittances should embrace different goals:

- Make pressure on financial and remittance operators to develop green financial remittance related products to help leverage money transfers into, for instance, rural/agricultural insurances, micro/credit facilities, especially for more vulnerable groups (such as women), and promote young environmental entrepreneurship.
- Offer **awareness-raising** initiatives targeting selected migrants on the dimensions of climate change, especially in Africa, including the possibility to **reinforce capacities** to: (i) value climate-related **information, in order to identify existing technological and innovative solutions**, as applicable to climate change prevention; (ii) **communicate** within the migrant group and with the country-of-origin community (privileging social media), and (iii) **identify and refine appropriate individual or group projects/interventions** (ie. on energy, land use, irrigation and water management etc) – also disposing dedicated resources;
- Craft and disseminate **simple and intuitive assessment systems and tools** to help migrants to discuss and evaluate with their family and community the apparent risks of environmental degradation;
- Map and involve **influencers or testimonials** appreciated by migrant communities;
- **Facilitate the familiarity and possible partnership with local organizations operating in the country of origin** committed to promote sustainable development and green behaviors (ie. agro-ecological cultivation techniques, limited use of pesticides, reforestation and recycling, sustainable and stable buildings constructed with local resources etc.), as well as players sensitive to ecological issues in the country of destination.